

I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System. aciccone

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Assignment 06

Part 1

Read the document: FB_Secret_Mood_Manipulation.pdf which is posted on the Canvas site. Write a 200-word summary of the events outlined in the article.

Facebook, being the overall sketchy company they always have been, did a study in 2012 where they manipulated user data to see a result. For one week they were giving people one of either more positive or more negative stories / posts on their news feeds. After doing that, they observed if any changes would happen after the manipulation. As they expected, the subjects posted either more positive things, or more negative things, depending on what they were shown. The research goal was summarized as "We wanted to see if we could make you feel bad, without you noticing." With that in mind, they saw successful results. People that were shown negative, tended to post more words in a negative manner and vice-versa for people shown positive. They also concluded that people that were shown less emotional posts / stories wound up posting less words overall. While the experiment is interesting, were the minimal results worth the large ethical concern being brought up? Facebook stated that they went through a IRB process before they conducted the study, but the IRB said they didn't know what to say because the data was already collected. A branch of the army sponsored the experiment and apparently, they do these kinds of news feed tweaks all the time.

Write a 300-word essay on ethics in online social networks. Do you think the Facebook mood experiment was ethical? Are any types of experiments or studies that are done without the subjects' knowledge or consent ethical? What types of studies or experiments might you find reasonable or useful, if any? This happened in 2012; do you think it could happen again today? Why or why not? You may also include your insights into the GDPR issue, if you wish.

I do not think the Facebook mood experiment was ethical, but I do not think it would have been able to work if it was. The information it was trying to gather was subconscious data about how people react to seeing positive or negative information on their regular newsfeeds. With that being said, if people were aware of it, then it would cause a slew of conscious thoughts to stray what they post in a direction that was not intended. Getting outside approval would certainly improve how this experiment is thought of, rather than just Facebook kind of just deciding to do it and analyzing the data after. Maybe Facebook could have said something along the lines of "in the coming weeks we are going to be performing a study on the data that we give to you, and the data you put back out." That may create some sort of conscious bias about that data, but at least the people are being made aware of it. Essentially, though, this kind of experiment will not work as expected unless the participants are made unaware of it during the entire data collection process because it is meant to track subconscious actions. These types of experiments/studies are very reasonable and useful, to me, because the brain is a very interesting and mysterious thing that yet dictates everything that we as humans do. There are so many conscious and subconscious habits that have not been discovered or well understood, except maybe to professionals in relevant fields. I definitely think that something like this could happen again, but most

likely not as drastic and poorly thought out. The results of the Facebook study was unappealing, and almost expected. If there is a bigger idea that is hatched from one of these massive data-collecting companies, there could be a big breakthrough in how we think about the mind. The huge upscale of communication and traces of actions / words could contribute to a better understanding of how humans work as a whole. I do hope that they can find a way to keep the unawareness of the trial to a minimum, while also keeping the efficacy to a maximum for the next time this happens.

Part 2

Read the article: [Is_It_Time_to_Delete_TikTok.pdf](#), which is posted on the Canvas site. In it, the author answers 7 questions about the safety and advisability of using TikTok. Several of these questions could also be of concern to users of any online social network.

1. For each of the 7 questions: a. copy the question. b. summarize the author's answer in a sentence or two. c. write a few sentences giving your thoughts on that issue.

a) 1.Q: What data does TikTok gather?

- b) Tiktok says that they gather your viewing information, the private messages you send, and your location, internet address, and what device you are using. Beyond that, any other information they gather would be asked for so its consensual, examples being phone number and contact information.
- c) I think that TikTok has every right to gather the basic information. If they are lying about what they do with that information, like giving it to the Chinese government, then there are bigger issues at hand. Beyond the basic information, they can't take any deeper information without first requesting permission to your device which would mean you know what they are asking for and have the option to deny access.

a) 2.Q: Does the TikTok app do anything shady?

- b) TikTok has seen issues in the past, like collecting clipboard information frequently even when the app is open in the background, but they have seemingly done their best to fix those issues. Also there were parental issues that they carried over from musicaly, but they have since increased their parental guidelines.
- c) It's hard to tell how to feel about the company being shady, because I can't exactly quantify my trust for them. There aren't any hard facts besides their word, but with that alone I can say that they seem trustworthy

a) 3.Q: What are the U.S. government's concerns about TikTok?

- b) China has a lot of power over their tech companies. Considering TikTok says they are not giving information to the Chinese government, then its possible that they were telling the truth because China has not yet asked for the data.
- c) The threat of China getting American's data from TikTok is pretty high, but that information isn't exactly going to be a big threat unless there is something HUGE going on in the word. I don't think we need to worry about China having our data until WWII, and even then let's hope they aren't on the opposite side.

a) 4.Q: Does TikTok data get stored in China?

- b) Tiktok says they store all their user data in the US and Singapore, and is unverifiable to see if they send it elsewhere after, and that they can share personal information with "parents

subsidiaries, or other affiliates of their corporate group". There was also a claim that they were sending data to Chinese addresses, and using code from other big tech companies in China but did not get a fruitful response from Nash-Hahn.

- c) TikTok is probably telling the truth about where they store user data, but that doesn't imply they don't send it to other places. Its not unrealistic to think they could be sending some data somewhere in China, but there would have to be a need for the **basic** user information.
- a) **5.Q: Can the Chinese government force TikTok to hand over your data?**
- b) China technically has the right to demand the data, but TikTok says they haven't received that kind of request and would deny it if they did. TikTok is also hardly the worry for data transmission to China, there are tons of ways for them to gather data on Americans without asking TikTok.
- c) Its probably true that TikTok would deny the request for data from China, but its not so easy to deny a request from them. China can also get data about Americans from many other sources that hard to quantify, but I'd expect China to dip their toes in everything just like the US does.
- a) **6.Q: Is it better or worse than Facebook?**
- b) Facebook is horrifying in the amount of data they collect, but its pretty hard to tell what TikTok collects because they make an effort to hide it. Facebook received the largest fine of \$5billion from the FTC which is the largest in history.
- c) I doubt TikTok is collecting more data than scary-town Facebook. Facebook has also pretty much set the standard of scary/watching-over-your-shoulder type companies, especially with their research in 2012.
- a) **7.Q: Is there anything you can do to reduce your privacy risk and keep using TikTok?**
- b) Other than just not using the app, its hard to keep your data away from TikTok. You can not accept requests for device permissions / not make an account at all.
- c) Maybe I'm just too young to understand, but it doesn't seem like the data they are collecting is a big deal. Naturally don't give the app more permissions than you need to use it, but no many people have that idea in their head to begin with.

2. Write a short (100 word minimum) paragraph describing your feelings on the Tik Tok privacy/security concerns and how the issues compare to other social networks.

I have, personally, been a big consumer of TikTok over the past year, probably more so during quarantine. Also being a CS major, I have a bit of an obsession with hiding my data and keeping my passwords secure, but I still don't fear the data collection of TikTok. Facebook and google are way more horrifying because you can't avoid using them without going through major changes in your life, only if you currently use them, and what can they even do with that data. Location data, phone numbers, and email addresses are just identifiers that we freely give to people anyway. Passwords, credit cards, and other secret information that is usually kept to yourself is where things could actually get scary. Its wrong to think that the data is in wrong hands because the company is Chinese, when Google can, unrealistically, create a clone of the "you" they have on file; putting together all the personal information they can also check your schedule and the places you travel to on a weekly basis (if you have your location settings on).